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CHAPTER III

LATER VALLEY SETTLEMENTS

The early settlers who came to Provo Valley were interested in establishing homes and gaining their livelihood from agriculture. In this semi-arid region they were forced to depend largely upon irrigation to make the land productive. Those who moved in from other sections of the state were already familiar with this system of getting water to the land, and those who were new were soon impressed with its necessity. A brief reference to the map of the area shows the pioneer settlements strung along the river and streams like ornaments on a tree. It would not be an overstatement to say that in the beginning the size of the settlement was almost directly proportional to the amount of accessible irrigation water. The importance of irrigation and the way in which the pioneers cooperated to obtain the necessary water is the subject of a later chapter. Suffice it here to say that the availability of irrigation water was the determining factor in the selection of sites for pioneer settlement in Wasatch County.

Later in the County's history a number of other factors gave rise to settlements and impetus to the growth of those already established. The growth of Keetley can only be explained in terms of successful mining, and work in railroad shops meant much to Soldier's Summit. We have considered the settlement of Heber previously. How and why the other towns and cities of the County grew is the subject of this chapter.

MIDWAY

Provo Valley is roughly divided into an eastern and western half by the river that runs through it. On either side of the river a number of large streams lattice the

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terrain which slopes up and away from the river to the nearby mountains. The settlement at Heber was designed to take advantage of the water supplied by Lake



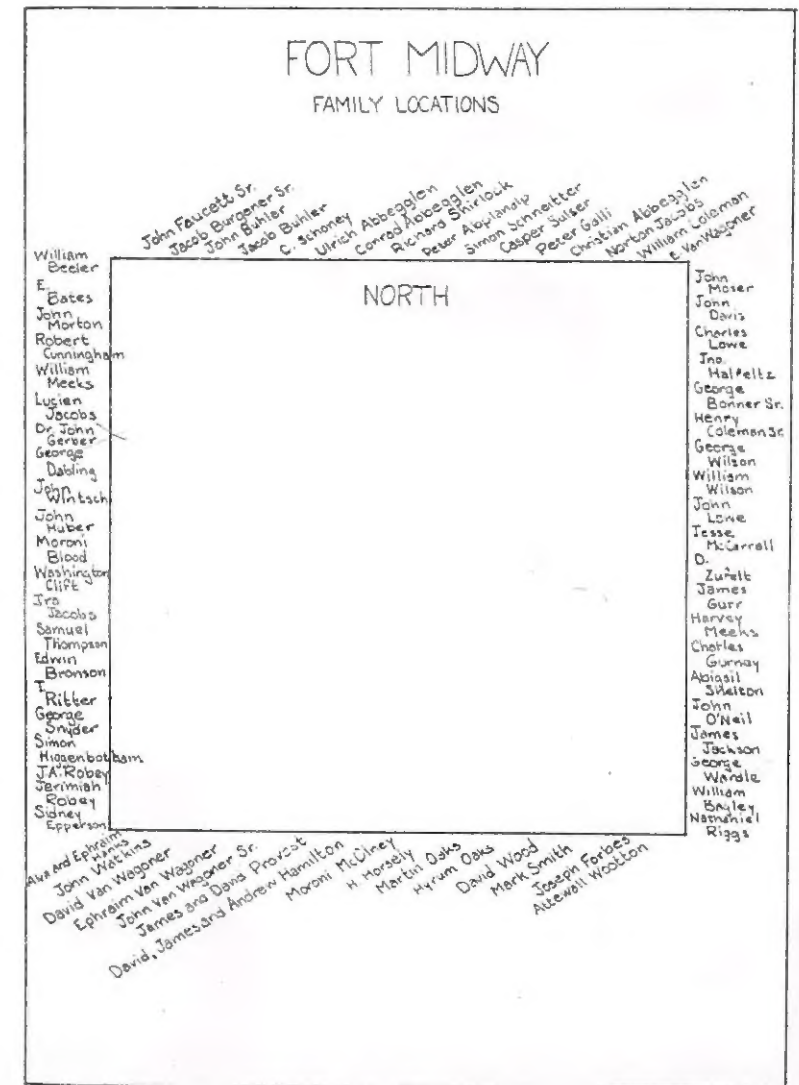
Midway and surrounding area

and Center Creeks on the eastern side of the valley.¹ At about the same time a number of settlers began work along Snake Creek on the west side. This was the beginning of what later came to be known as Midway.

At first there was no localized settlement. In the summer of 1859 a group consisting of Jeremiah Robey, Sidney Epperson, Mark Smith, David Wood, Jesse McCarrell, and Edwin Bronson put a crop of grain on the choicest lands bordering Snake Creek.² This was followed by a period of cabin and corral building. Others

¹John Crook, "A Statement of Securing the Water Rights of Heber City," (MSS in possession of Clark Crook, Heber Utah, 1889).

²Statement by Emily Coleman, personal interview, 1952.



Fort Midway plan showing location of each family

were not long in following, and soon enough families had settled along the creek to establish the nuclei for two communities known as the upper and lower settlements.

The upper settlement was first settled by Peter Shirts, John and Ephraim Hanks, and a Mr. Riggs in 1860.³ It was later named Mound City because of the numerous limestone formations in the region. A number of hot water springs flow from the bench land around upper Snake Creek, and over a period of many years they have deposited limestone sufficient to form a crust several inches thick on much of the surrounding land. The springs have also built up a number of good-sized limestone mounds at the point where they flow from the ground. The enterprising people in the valley cleared much of the porous limestone, known as pot rock, from the ground in order to farm. It was then piled up for fences or shaped for building material and many prominent and substantial buildings were made from it. The hot water in turn provided the basis for commercial warm water swimming activities and health resorts.

The growth of the upper and lower settlements required some sort of organization to coordinate the activity of the various families. In both places, as in other Latter-day Saint pioneer communities too small for organization into a ward, this was supplied originally by a presiding elder of the Church who, when sustained by the Church members, exercised political, judicial, military, and religious authority. In 1862 Sidney Epperson was appointed presiding elder over the upper settlement with John Fausett and Samuel Thompson as his counselors. By 1864 the lower settlement included some twenty families, and David Van Wagonen was appointed as the presiding elder there.⁴

³Simon Epperson, *Sidney Epperson Pioneer* (Heber, Utah, 1927), p. 20.

⁴*Ibid.*

The settlements continued to grow independently until Indian trouble threatened the settlers in 1866. In their exposed positions all along the creek the families were extremely vulnerable to the type of raid made by the Indians. The Church leaders advised them to join together and build a fort for their mutual protection. Tradition states that the question of the fort's location was a warm issue between the residents of both settlements. Loyal citizens of Mound City were extremely reluctant to leave the obvious virtues of their high surroundings to join the lower settlement, and the equally patriotic stalwarts of the lower settlement were just as naturally inclined to reject the offer to join the upper settlement. Finally, as a result of compromise, they built the fort midway between the two, and thus the present town of Midway got its name and location.

By mid-summer of 1866 seventy-five cabins stood on the fort line.⁵ Some of them were moved from the old settlements. The fort was never attacked, which fact itself is a tribute to the ability of the pioneers to cooperate in overcoming common difficulties.

In 1868 the families began to move out of the fort line into homes on the present Midway townsite, and the old fort line formed the public square for the new town.